

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks Prior to a Tour of the New Mexico State Emergency Operations Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico

June 11, 2022

The President. Well, first of all, thanks for what you do. And we have a little outfit like this back in Washington too. And we—one of the things that we understand—and I made the point today with the Governor and others—is that we have a responsibility—a responsibility. And not just at the State level, but at the Federal level. And I hope you're aware that we've—we're meeting that responsibility to the tune of billions of dollars.

One of the things that we talked about a moment ago with your elected officials and the Governor in a couple of buildings over was the—the need to—for us to get more agile in dealing with the aftermath of fires, the aftermath of tornados, the aftermath of hurricanes—because the damage done there—your monsoon season is coming up. If you don't get out—we don't get out there and clear the way, a lot more damage will be done even maybe than the fires caused—even maybe than the fires caused.

And I have had the dubious distinction of being to—I think it's now 15 of these events, including the tornados in Kentucky, the hurricanes in Louisiana, the fires that range all the way from—we've—I've been in—in Idaho, Oregon, the State of Washington, Northern California, flying over—closely over areas with—in helicopters that—where you can see the granular impact of all of this. And it's been profound. It's been profound.

And what my—my Director—is—is FEMA here—in here? Is she—she had to catch the flight. Anyway, what we're doing in talking with the Governor—I learned early on as President: When the Governor calls, and they say, "The Governor of New Mexico is on the phone," I just say, "Just tell her yes." [*Laughter*] Better say "yes" right away.

But look at what the coordination has required. Those helicopters—and a lot of those helicopters and those aircraft, you wouldn't have them without the Federal Government and the National Guard and—you know, a lot of what's going on here. And I'm not saying "Federal Government" like that's a big thing.

But my point is that we have to all cooperate. This is a long-term—you know, your delegation has been incredibly helpful to doing everything that's happening here and the Governor is requesting. But they're also working like hell to make sure that we end up with circumstances where you have nothing that we pay 100 percent of the damage done.

For example, people can only get 35 grand to get back in their home. But we're—these guys have a bill in the Congress right now—and I'm strongly supporting it—saying that you get complete reimbursement to rebuild your home as it was, your ranch as it was, your circumstance as it was. We are doing that in areas where I have the authority to allow for 100 percent reimbursement.

But one of the things that you guys are going to have to be—we need your input on as we go down the road here is the aftermath of these fires, the aftermath of the tornados, the aftermath of the hurricanes.

For example, I come from an area of the world—the State of Delaware—a little State, but it's a wealthy little State—but it's on the ocean. We're 2 feet above sea level for most of the—excuse me, three feet above sea level for most of the State. And the seas are rising. Global—global changes are happening that are enormous.

And I just want everybody out here to remember that we are a Federal system. And that's why I have no reluctance to do everything we possibly can to meet all of New Mexico's needs and stay as long as it takes to meet those needs. Not a joke.

But one of the—but one of the things that I mentioned in the last—and I'll end with this—the last little discussion we had next door was that—you know, remember: This is a Federal system. And when other States need the help, y'all have to ante up too. I don't mean just the emergency issue. I mean the people of the State have to ante up.

There is a reluctance to say: "My State needs help. But I don't know, we're going to do that for that other State?" The answer is: This a Federal system. We have a responsibility to every single solitary State in the Union—not based on whether you're Democrat, Republican; rich, poor—no matter what it is.

And so I think there's a lot we can do. And one of the things that I've been talking to some of your mayors about, as well as all across the country, is global change and climate change is going to continue. I know I've been pushing it really, really hard to spend more money. We have a lot of money being held up—as a matter of fact, about \$40 billion—to provide for alternatives to what we're seeing now by providing—anyway, without getting into it, to deal with climate change.

And by the way, I want to promise you: Windmills do not cause cancer. And this matters. I know I'm joking, but I'm not joking. We've got to get smart. And you all understand it better than anybody because you sit here every day when there's a crisis and you wonder: What little kid is dying? What little kid is dying in one of those fires you can't get to? What's happening?

I had to do the fun—so damn many funerals for firefighters. The Hotshots, when they got trapped in that canyon, I went out there. And what I saw was not them; I saw their families, their kids, their wives, their husbands, their mothers, their fathers.

And so it's all over. You guys get it because you're the ones sending out people to risk their lives. And some of you are the ones out risking your lives.

You know, I said earlier that I've said it all the time: "God made man, then he made a few firefighters." And that's true. The only thing that protects firefighters is more firefighters. So when you need to increase the funding for your firefighters, step up, vote for it, pay for it. When you want to make sure you're going to protect all these folks, it requires input.

And by the way, there's only been—you know, my Secretary of Interior, her family has only been here for 34 generations, so she's new to the place. But—is that right? It's 34 or 36?

Secretary of the Interior Debra A. Haaland. Thirty-five.

The President. Thirty-five generations. But the point is that there's so much we can do, but we're going to have to do. We're going to have to do it.

And so I hope everybody understands that what you're doing here, you're saving people's lives. You're not just saving their property, they're saving lives. And we're prepared to make sure we can do everything we can to make it—be easy for you to be able to do it. And for all the Hotshots who go out there, all the firefighters, all the National Guard, all that they have what they need.

And the last thing I'll say is that I was talking to some of the mayors on the way out, as you saw me when I was trying to get out of the last—walking out the last meeting. You know what? I used to be a local official. If I never attend a zoning hearing again in my life, I'll die a happy man. Talk about war and peace. Zoning is something else.

But all kidding aside, we have to rethink how we develop. We have to rethink how we build. We have to rethink where we build. Not I'm talking—not talking about those magnificent

mountains I just flew up. And we didn't get to fly in Air Force One—flew the whole perimeter. We didn't get to go in.

But you know as well—you know better than most people what's at stake here. So talk to your—talk to your fellow—talk to your neighbors, talk to your friends about what we have to do. And we can do this. This is the United States of America. There's nothing beyond our capacity when we're united. And this is one of those areas that's going to increase.

Like I said—for example, I was recently down in Kentucky—not recently; 6 months ago. Beautiful middle class neighborhood, old homes. Actually, technically, I guess economically slightly lower middle class, like where I grew up, on little—in a rolling area—the rolling hills. Well, guess what? A fire came, burned a lot of them down. But guess what came next? The heavy rains. Wiped everything out. Blew everything away that wasn't down.

So we've got to figure out what we do. What are the aftermath? What are you going to—what are we going to do? Is it going to land on your laps? You're the ones who are going to have to be the ones doing it and directing it. So there's a lot we can do.

And by the way, when I think climate change—and I know I get—people are tired of hearing me talk about climate change—I think jobs. Jobs. It creates a lot of good-paying jobs—and saves a lot of lives.

But with that, I'm violating a cardinal principle. I'm in a very important Governor's State and I'm talking too much. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:43 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham of New Mexico; and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Bennett Criswell. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 12. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Tour of the New Mexico State Emergency Operations Center.

Locations: Santa Fe, NM.

Names: Criswell, Deanne Bennett; Grisham, Michelle Lujan; Haaland, Debra A.

Subjects: Economy, national : Household income and wages; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Climate change; Government organization and employees : Federal programs, improvement efforts; Interior, Department of : Secretary; Natural disasters : Preparedness efforts; Natural disasters : Response and recovery efforts; Natural disasters : Wildfires, prevention and response efforts; New Mexico : Governor; New Mexico : Santa Fe :: President's visit.

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